

SUSTAINABILITY BEGINS WITH PRESERVATION

Seattle, Wash.

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It's always a pleasure to come to Seattle – but I'm especially happy to be here on this occasion. Tomorrow, a major event in the recent history of the National Trust will take place here in Seattle, marking a big step forward in one of the most important programs we've ever undertaken. We're enormously excited about it, and I'll have more to say about it a bit later.

But first, since some of you may not be familiar with the work of the National Trust, I'd like to begin with a few words about who we are and what we do. The National Trust was created in 1949 to be the leader of America's preservation movement. We are a privately-funded nonprofit organization. We have about 270,000 members, and a staff of about 300 at our headquarters in Washington, our 6 regional offices, and our collection of 29 historic sites from New England to California.

Over the years, we've worked closely with our partners here in Washington to help ensure the preservation of this state's rich heritage. We've provided financial assistance to projects across the state – including, just last year, \$5 million in tax-credit equity to help convert a historic men's club into a luxury hotel here in Seattle. In addition, we've presented National Preservation Awards to a number of projects, individuals and organizations in the state, and we've named 5 Washington communities to our annual "Dozen Distinctive Destinations" list. Most recently, here in Seattle, we joined a number of local and statewide groups in the long – and ultimately successful – effort to prevent the demolition of this very building, the historic First United Methodist Church. That was a tough battle, but being here today confirms that it was worth the effort.

Our work in Seattle and across Washington State reflects the National Trust's overall mission, which I can sum up in a sentence: We help people appreciate the historic buildings, neighborhoods and landscapes that tell America's story, and we give them the tools they need to keep our heritage intact and alive. To put it another way, we help people protect, enhance and enjoy the places that matter.

The word "sustainability" doesn't appear in that description – but it's a concept we've been dealing with for some time. Back in 1980, long before the word "sustainability" came into widespread use, the National Trust issued a poster that showed an old building in the shape of a gas can – a reminder that recycling an existing building is a good way to conserve energy.

Much has changed since that poster appeared 29 years ago. The stakes have gotten much higher. Climate forecasts, population growth projections, dwindling reserves of water and fossil fuels, even the daily news headlines – they all warn us that we can't wait for "somebody" to figure out what to do. The "somebody" we need is us.

Up to now, our approach to life on this planet has been based on the assumption that “there’s plenty more where that came from.” Now, we have to face the fact that there may not be “plenty more” of anything – except trouble. Here’s my message in a nutshell: As people grow more and more concerned about climate change, the degradation of the environment, and our consumption of energy and natural resources, historic preservation has an essential role to play in dealing with the crisis that looms over us.

Let’s begin with some facts.

The United States has 5% of the world’s population but produces 22% of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions. Transportation accounts for 32% of these emissions. But here’s a surprising fact: 43% of America’s carbon emissions comes from the operation of buildings. If nearly half of the carbon we send into the atmosphere comes from our buildings, it’s clear that dealing with climate change must include being smarter about how we design and use our buildings.

I’m talking about stewardship – and that’s what preservation is all about. Preservation keeps old buildings viable so they can play meaningful roles in community life. It shows that buildings are renewable – not disposable – resources. If that’s not sustainability, I don’t know what else to call it.

For the next few minutes, I want to present 3 preservation-based principles that can help us address the climate-change crisis – and, in the process, improve our communities and boost our economy.

Principle #1: Reuse existing buildings

Statistics tell us that the way we use our buildings causes big problems – but incredibly, our solution is to use more resources to construct more new buildings while ignoring the ones we already have. That makes no sense. Even if we could require that every new building must be “green” – and I wish we could – this wouldn’t address the massive amount of carbon emitted by the operation of existing buildings. In addition to building green, we have to make wise use of what we’ve already built.

Here’s what I mean: Buildings are vast repositories of energy. It takes energy to manufacture or extract building materials, more energy to transport them to a construction site, still more energy to assemble them into a building. All of that energy is embodied in the finished structure – and if the structure is demolished and landfilled, the energy locked up in it is totally wasted. What’s more, the process of demolition itself uses more energy – and, of course, the construction of a new building in place of the demolished one uses more yet.

Let me give you some numbers that will translate that concept into reality.

- Most of you are familiar with the historic Grand Central Arcade in Pioneer Square, built in 1890. I’m told it has about 50,000 square feet of space. According to a formula produced for the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, about 80 billion BTUs of energy are embodied in a typical commercial building of that size and vintage. If the Grand Central Arcade were to be torn down, all of that embodied energy – the equivalent of 640,000 gallons of gasoline – would be wasted.

- What's more, demolishing a building the size of Grand Central Arcade would create nearly 4,000 tons of waste. That's enough debris to fill 26 railroad boxcars – a train nearly a quarter of a mile long, headed for a landfill that is filling up fast.
- Once an old building is gone, putting up a new one in its place takes more energy, of course, and it also uses more natural resources and releases new pollutants into our environment. Constructing a new 50,000-square-foot building to replace the Grand Central Arcade would spew about as much carbon into the atmosphere as driving a car 2.8 million miles.
- One more point: A report from the Brookings Institution projects that by 2030 we will have demolished nearly 1/3 of all existing buildings. This wasteful orgy of destruction and new construction will use enough energy to power the entire state of California for 10 years.

It comes down to this: We can't build our way out of the climate-change crisis. We have to conserve our way out. No matter how much green technology it employs, any new building represents a new impact on the environment. The greenest building is probably one that already exists.

Principle #2: Reinvest in existing communities

Instead of building more new highways and strip malls and subdivisions further and further out on the urban fringe, we have to become better, smarter stewards of the communities we already have.

We hear a lot about smart growth these days, and I'm convinced that you can't have smart growth without preservation. Here's why:

- Smart growth emphasizes density of development, mixed uses, and a pedestrian orientation. These are characteristics of older neighborhoods. Preserving them is smart growth.
- Cities have a major investment in the infrastructure of older neighborhoods – the streets, schools, water and sewer lines, and so on. Making good use of this investment, instead of leaving it underused and duplicating it elsewhere, is smart growth.
- Reuse of older buildings allows for growth without consumption of land. Revitalizing Main Street means less demand for a new strip mall. Converting a warehouse into 40 dwelling units reduces the demand for new houses on 10 acres of farmland. That's smart growth at its best.

This is not just a pie-in-the-sky abstraction. It reflects real-world, on-the-ground experience. The National Trust's Main Street program demonstrates the power of preservation as an engine that drives real, sustainable revitalization.

Since 1980, the program has worked in about 2,200 communities. In those places, almost 88,000 new businesses and more than 391,000 new jobs have been created, and close to \$50 billion has been reinvested in business districts that once were dying.

Ten Washington State communities are currently participating in the Main Street program. Since 1991, those towns have seen more than 6,000 new jobs

created and \$218 million in reinvestment downtown. Visit Bainbridge Island or Port Townsend or any other Main Street town, and see for yourself: As a tool for restoring economic vitality to downtowns and neighborhood business districts hit hard by sprawl and disinvestment, preservation works. It's as simple as that.

Principle #3: Retrofit the building stock

Older buildings have a reputation for being energy hogs – but in fact, some older buildings are as energy-efficient as recently-built ones. When the General Services Administration examined its nationwide inventory, it found that utility costs for historic buildings were 27% less than for more modern ones. Other data suggests that buildings constructed before 1920 are actually more energy-efficient than those put up between 1920 and 2000.

It's not hard to figure out why. Many older buildings have thick, solid walls that can help reduce the amount of energy needed for heating and cooling. Many older buildings have transoms, high ceilings, and big, operable windows for natural light and ventilation. They use shaded porches, overhanging eaves, careful siting and landscaping, and other features to maximize sun exposure during the winter and minimize it during warmer months.

Here's another point: Most older buildings were constructed so that their individual components – such as windows, for example – can be easily repaired or replaced when necessary. Even more important, older buildings were generally built to last. Because of their durability and "repairability," they have almost unlimited "renewability" – a fact that underscores the folly of wasting them.

There are some exemplary green rehab projects here in Seattle, and I've seen others from Portland, Oregon, to Little Rock, Arkansas. I'm especially proud of one example in the "other" Washington: Last spring, in Washington, D.C., the National Trust opened President Lincoln's Cottage to the public – and just a few yards away from the Cottage, the Visitor Education Center is housed in a renovated historic building that will be LEED Gold-certified.

Examples such as these – and there are many others – show that older buildings – even historic buildings – can "go green" without losing the distinctive character that makes them unique and appealing. We don't have to choose between getting the energy-efficiency we want or keeping the historic character we love; we can have both.

Now let's talk about the bottom line – dollars and cents.

The current economic crisis has everyone scrambling to identify ways to stimulate local economies and create jobs. The situation reminds me of what a British statesman told his colleagues during the darkest days of World War II: "Gentlemen, we are out of money; therefore, we shall have to think."

Think about this: Dollar for dollar, rehabbing an existing building creates more jobs than constructing a new one. One study found that \$1 million invested in rehab creates at least 9 more jobs than the same \$1 million invested in new construction. Why? Rehab requires more man-hours and fewer materials than

new construction – and an economy that is more labor-intensive and less materials-intensive is a greener economy.

Here's something else to consider: Much of the work involved in rehabbing a building requires skilled craftsmanship – which means that historic rehab, combined with job training programs, can build a corps of workers with bankable skills that will serve them well for a lifetime. Efforts to create “green” jobs often focus on developing things such as solar panels, wind turbines and other highly technical solutions – but we shouldn't overlook the wisdom of a statement in Van Jones's book, *The Green Collar Economy*. He suggests that “the main piece of technology in the green economy is a caulk gun.”

The rehab and retrofit of existing buildings is essential in fighting climate change and in bringing jobs back to American communities. We've always known that preservation is good for the soul; now we know it's good for the environment and the pocketbook as well.

Those are the 3 principles, and they illustrate a simple fact: In community after community, preservation has shown its effectiveness as a tool for improving older neighborhoods, for offering viable alternatives to sprawl, for creating lively, attractive places to live and work, for allowing older buildings to shelter people instead of pigeons. That's real sustainability.

The facts are in, and now it's time to act – especially in the area of public policy. Our job is to show policy-makers how reuse, reinvestment and retrofit can help build a sustainable future, and then help them build the legislative framework that will make it happen.

For one thing, we need federal incentives to encourage property owners to go green. Existing incentives for home retrofits, for example, simply don't work. The incentive they provide is too little, it can only be used for new materials, not labor, and it doesn't do anything to provide the technical expertise that can help owners do the right thing. In response to this need, the National Trust and our partners are working in support of federal legislation that will offer homeowners a more substantial rebate for greening their homes, and will connect them to the technical expertise they need when making decisions about retrofits.

Greening America's homes is an important first step, but there's more to be done. As some of you know, the federal government provides a 20% tax credit for the rehabilitation of certified historic structures. In the past 10 years alone, this program has sparked the rehab of more than 217 million square feet of historic commercial and residential space – saving huge amounts of energy and fostering revitalization in cities from coast to coast. It's a great program, but it can be even better. We've proposed legislation that would provide a “green supplement” to increase the amount of the tax credit for historic rehab projects that achieve specified energy efficiency levels.

These and other efforts at the federal level are important, but I believe the most important work will be done at the local level.

That brings me to the upcoming event that I'm very excited about. Tomorrow, here in downtown Seattle, Mayor Nickels and other local leaders will join me in formally opening the National Trust's Preservation Green Lab. The Green Lab will partner with selected cities and states to showcase energy-efficient rehab projects, to develop innovative sustainability policies, and to ensure that municipal plans, building and zoning codes support reuse, reinvestment, and green retrofits. Here's one issue we'll address: More and more states and cities are developing Climate Change Action Plans that outline how they intend to fight global warming – usually through expanding recycling programs, encouraging the use of mass transit, and so on. Few of these plans say much about green retrofits, and even fewer establish retention and reuse of existing buildings as a priority. In effect we're encouraging people to recycle newsprint and cans while throwing away sound, reusable buildings. This is a serious mis-step, and we'll work to correct it.

We'll also work to help local government make the best use of federal stimulus money and other funds that will be made available through upcoming legislation intended to improve energy efficiency and reduce fossil fuel emissions. We believe that the most responsible way cities can use this money is to promote the "three R's" I mentioned earlier – reusing existing buildings, reinvesting in quality neighborhoods, and retrofitting the building stock – and that's what the Green Lab will encourage them to do.

The Green Lab has already signed up three partner cities -- Seattle, San Francisco and Dubuque – and we'll be looking for others. We believe we can make a difference, and we're eager to roll up our sleeves and get to work.

I believe climate change is the defining issue of our time – and will be for generations to come.

We have a choice: We can do nothing for a while longer – until we're forced to take action by soaring energy costs, the disappearance of irreplaceable resources, and the realities of climate change. Or we can take steps now to develop a smart sustainability ethic and the policies to support it.

Historic preservation has always sustained America by working to protect and celebrate the evidence of its past. Now, by addressing the challenge of climate change, preservation can – and must – play a leadership role in the sustainable stewardship of America's future.